
REV. DR. HERRICK'S

SERMON AT THE FIFTY-SIXTH ANNIVERSARY

AMERICAN SEAMEN'S FRIEND SOCIETY.

CHRIST FOR THE SAILOR—THE SAILOR FOR CHRIST;

A DISCOURSE BEFORE

THE AMERICAN SEAMEN'S FRIEND SOCIETY,

AT ITS

FIFTY-SIXTH ANNIVERSARY,

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BY

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SERMON.

Mark iii, 9.—"And he spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him."

Aside from the evident convenience which would be secured by our Lord for the purpose of teaching the thronging multitudes that pressed about him on the sea shore, there is a touch of propriety in the command, which I do not remember to have seen noticed by any of the commentators upon this passage. In the verse just preceeding we are told that a great multitude came to him from the region about Tyre and Sidon. And it was for the purpose of teaching these men that he commanded the attendance of a small ship. Tyre and Sidon, the two great cities of Phœnicia, were renowned beyond all others of the ancient world for their maritime commerce. The whole lives of these men were associated with the sea, with sailors and with ships. Not improbably many among them had been or were even then men of the sea. Not improbably the suggestion was present to the mind of the Master that a bond of sympathy and kindly feeling might be established between himself and them, should they see him speaking from a boat as his pulpit. They would take the truth more kindly at his lips were he to speak to them as a sailor to sailors. Then as now, sailor's heart warmed to sailor's heart. The men of Tyre and Sidon would be sure to give respectful hearing to the man of Galilee, when they discovered that like themselves he was no stranger to the pains and perils of the seaman's life. Even as the sailors of Boston thirty years ago loved Father Taylor, or as their successors, in later days, believed in Peter Larsen.

I am jealous of those petty methods of interpretation which read large meanings into the most trivial incidents of the Gospel story, and therefore I notice this matter simply as an interesting coincidence, without putting upon it any special emphasis. But I do not think I shall be transgressing the limits of sober exegesis if I seize this command of our Lord that a small ship or boat should wait upon him, that he might more conveniently pursue his evangelistic labors, and deduce from it as my theme for this occasion,—*The importance of making the sea with its forces, moral and material, auxiliary to the extension of the kingdom of Christ.*

From the beginning the Gospel has sought the alliance of the sea. Our Lord's personal labors when upon earth were confined to a small and comparatively insignificant territory. And yet in those labors the sea of Galilee with its shipping and its sailors played no unimportant part. Lying as it did, a fair sheet of water some fourteen miles long and half as many broad, in the very heart of Palestine, without its boats and sailors it might not have been a serious obstacle and hindrance to his work, though with them it served as a most ready and helpful medium of communication. It was a little sheet of water, to be sure, and its ships were small at largest, but we must not allow our modern ideas to do injustice to the Galilean fishermen and their seamanship. They were the skilled sailors of their day. The lake was not contemptible, its storms were not gentle breezes, its dangers were not inconsiderable, its vessels were not mean. Josephus narrates a sea fight which took place on the lake, conducted on the part of the Romans by no less a commander than Vespasian himself. Its sailors, rough, hardy, weather-beaten men like our own mariners, were the Lord's generous helpers and furnished a large proportion of his chosen disciples. When a few years later he took his departure, the disciples to whom he had committed the continuance of his work with the command, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," found a broader sea to be traversed, lying, as its name implied, in the heart of the world as it was known to them. The little lake of Tiberias gives place now to the Mediterranean. For Capernaum and Bethsaida and Tiberias and Chorazin, they had now Corinth and Alexandria and Thessalonica and Rome. In the broader promulgation of the Gospel the fishing-boats of Capernaum and Bethsaida must give place to the corn-ships of Alexandria and the transports of Rome. Gennesaret was girdled by Judaism. The Mediterranean introduced its navigators to the nations of the earth. To and fro across that inland sea passed the great apostle to the Gen-

tiles until he knew all its ports, was familiar with its prevailing winds, could read its signs of storm and calm, until he was as expert a mariner as he was in making goat-skin tents, and in the time of peril could counsel the sailors with wisdom better than their own. “Thrice I suffered shipwreck,” he exclaimed,—“a night and a day I have been in the deep.”

For centuries the Mediterranean was the highway of Christianity, and Mediterranean sailors shared with the apostles the honor of spreading its triumphs. The churches were few that were formed without their aid. The large ships waited upon Christ and his Gospel as the small ones had done upon the sea of Tiberias. To Gaul, to Spain, to Africa the corn-ships carried along with the bread which perisheth, the bread which endureth unto everlasting life. And even to Britain the Roman war-ships along with the legions of the empire carried the soldiers of the cross. Then, when after the long night of the Middle Ages had passed away, and the revival of letters was followed by a reformation of religion, and discovery had unveiled a new world to the cupidity of commerce, and there were broader seas to be crossed and greater dangers to be braved, the voice of the man of Galilee was again heard making a corresponding demand that a ship should wait upon him. And then came along with the gold seekers and fortune hunters the pious Catholics exploring our inland lakes and rivers, the Dutchmen of the New Netherlands, the Pilgrims of Plymouth and the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay, the Huguenots of Oxford and New Rochelle, the Scotch and North Irelanders of the middle colonies, until out of the varied elements the genius of Christianity built up a Christian nation, and another grand step was taken in the conquest of the world to Jesus Christ. Again history expanded her horizon, the globe was circumnavigated, and the vast insular world of Australasia was opened up to commerce and to religion by the courage and enterprise of European sailors,—a wilderness of utter darkness and degradation when discovered,—but thanks under God to sailors’ fortitude wedded to Christian zeal, sparkling on the bosom of the Pacific, today, like a baldrick of island gems glowing with the radiance of heaven.

The lines of Tiberias have swept on and out until the little inland lake seems to have taken in the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, the Pacific. Capernaum and Bethsaida have taken to themselves Alexandria, Rome, London, New York, San Francisco, Honolulu, Queens-town. But once more that mighty voice is heard calling for a ship to aid Him in His work, and now, where the farthest east and the remotest west meet on the shore of the Pacific,—in Yeddo and Yokohama,

in Pekin and Canton, the sailor, obedient to the call, has at last girdled the world with the story of the cross.

I have no doubt that in "Simon Peter and Andrew his brother, and James the son of Zebedee and John his brother," our Lord discerned peculiar features of character which adapted them to the work of Apostleship. But does not the history of Christianity and its progress for eighteen hundred years, in the light which it reflects upon His choice of these men, make it abundantly evident that He contemplated at the outset the perpetual alliance of the sea and its forces with the work of His Kingdom? How absolutely indispensable has the sailor been at every point of new departure! What a debt do we owe him! What a debt does all the world owe him! Without the intervention of his self-sacrificing service the Gospel itself must have been confined to the narrow region of its first publication, or at best to those adjacent territories which might have been reached by the Apostles' footsteps.

But large as has been the sailor's service to the Gospel, it might have been and ought to have been far greater. He has carried the apostle, the missionary, the church to their advancing conquests. He ought himself to be the apostle, the missionary, the church. Indeed our Savior seems to have contemplated not merely alliance, but identity. He made sailors themselves to be His first Apostles. In the beginning the sailor and the Apostle were one. Did not our Lord not only anticipate this,—that the continents are to be saved by the way of the sea,—when He made sailors the first evangelists, but did He not mean to teach His church this lesson for all time, that this important class of men must first be saved and utilized if she would most speedily and effectively save the world? Let the church learn this lesson, the very first that her Master taught, and not the least important. Let her go to the ships to find her missionaries, as He did.

For a missionary the sailor is, by virtue of his very calling,—an apostle of some sort, with a roving commission. Sailors are the common carriers, not of one world only, but of three worlds. Three millions there are of this apostolic class of men. What a mighty force if it were but inspired with loyalty to one common purpose! Moving over every sea, touching every shore, striking with some sort of moral impact, as ceaseless as that of the tides of ocean itself, the life of every land beneath the sun.

Indeed the analogy is a close one between this ever recurring moral influence and the hygienic value of the ocean tides. Think for a moment of that movement, grand, silent, mysterious, by which twice every twenty-four hours, now while we wake and now again while we

sleep, the unresting sea heaves its mighty tide upon our shores. That rising flood by its silent but resistless influx fills our docks, creeps up our creeks, sweeps up all our river-mouths, insinuates itself into all the tortuous windings of our shore-line, floods our marshes, covers our unsightly flats, bringing healthful purity, literally "the salt of the earth" with every visitation, and in exchange bearing away our pollution with every retirement. The tides are thus doing for us incessantly what the heaving lungs do for the heart's blood. Without this ceaseless ebb and flow every continent of earth, every island of the sea would be girdled or fringed with corruption and death.

But the ocean has other tides than these,—tides as ceaseless, as invisible. Would that they were as pure and wholesome! The rising of the waters to-day is not more certain than that a fresh wave of human life will come in upon us, bringing, probably, not purity but death. Some portion of these three millions of sailor-lives is now sweeping silently into our harbors. It will wind through our border streets. It will settle into every slum and fill every purieu of darkness and of vice. It will leave the seeds of disease. It will dissolve the foundations of virtue. It will strike more deeply the stains of shame and dishonor. It will imbrute sensibility and petrify conscience. And the fall of the tide to-night is not more certain than that this wave in its recession will take with it a charge of poison as deadly as it brought, not to lose it in the deep sea but to bear it to other shores, there amid other scenes to still "work out all uncleanness with greediness." And this ebb and flow is going on ceaselessly. Two thousand men, more or less, here in New York to-day, as many more to-morrow, some going, others coming, not all impure, not all bad; many of them, thank God, pure, honorable, good, life-givers wherever they go; but all out upon a mission, all apostolic, every one morally dynamic beyond human estimate or conception.

Now, because the sailor is such a moral dynamic, he ought to be secured to the Kingdom of Christ. Suppose every sailor's heart were charged with the grace of God, and every sailor's life were true and loyal to Jesus Christ. Suppose this incessant tide which rolls upon every shore were saturated with the purifying salt of Christian love, every ship a "Morning Star," the combined fleets of the nations the navy of the Kingdom of God, with Jesus Christ for Lord High Admiral. The sailor's life speaks in every language if his lips do not. Christian virtues, like Pagan vices, do not have to be translated in order to be understood as they pass from land to land. The beauty of the Lord appeals to every eye and impresses all the sons of men.

Suppose that every Christian land should make it its first endeavor to renovate and Christianize its own mercantile marine, what an immense Foreign Missionary work would be immediately and effectively accomplished! The commerce of the United States alone employs half a million sailors, one-sixth of the whole sailorhood of the globe. Why should not the Christians of the United States see to it that these men are evangelized and so do a great stroke of both Home and Foreign Mission work at once?

“Can it be done?” do you ask? This Society whose anniversary we are celebrating to-night is doing that very thing as rapidly as the Christians of America supply the means. It is leavening,—if you will allow me to use the word, Christ-ening,—the forces of the sea. It was content in former years with meeting the sailor as he set his foot upon the dock, giving him a Christian welcome, shielding him from the sharks and harpies of the shore, conducting him to clean and comfortable quarters, providing for his physical and spiritual necessities for the brief period of his life on land, and then bidding him God-speed in his new departure. And this was much. But it has learned the art, of late, of going to sea with him, of accompanying him with its counsels and its comforts into every latitude, of speaking its friendly words to him when half the world away from home and church, in the loneliness of the watch, in the peril of the storm. In a word it is sending to-day 400,000 chaplains in more than 8,000 vessels going and coming between the sea-ports of all countries. These chaplains speak to the German, the Dane, the Frenchman, the Spaniard, the Italian, as well as to the English and American sailor, and to each in his own tongue wherein he was born. They consume none of the ship’s supplies. They take on no airs of superiority. They are promoters of peace. They dispel *ennui*. They awaken the best feelings and affections of the men. They know how to be familiar without being obtrusive. They stand on terms of equal intimacy and confidence with captain, crew, and cabin-boy. They inevitably soften and humanize;—more, they Christianize. It has been my good fortune to fall in with many of these silent, but mighty chaplains, after long voyages, and I have revered them. As they have often come into port in well-worn and sometimes tattered uniform, weather-beaten, water-stained, honorably scarred, fragrant of oakum and tar, still more have I revered them. They have uttered no boastful words of their doings and their dangers as I have grasped them by the hands, but they have been eloquent to the eye, of noble duty done, of Christly service performed, whose only record was treasured up in sailors’ hearts and in

the book of God's remembrance. These 400,000 chaplains are doing a mighty work at an insignificant outlay. They are changing the quality of the moral forces of the sea. They are renovating and cleansing those perpetual tides. The Sailor's Library was a heaven-born thought. Multiply these chaplains a hundred fold and the promise will speedily be fulfilled,—“The abundance of the sea shall be converted unto Thee.”

Another consideration which forces upon us the importance of making the sailor auxiliary to the extension of the Kingdom of Christ is to be found in the fact that sailors as a class are peculiarly adapted to be the Apostles of Christianity. They are so adapted by the nature of their calling as well as by virtue of their opportunities. The sailor is brought face to face with God as other men are not. No narrow horizon shuts down upon his vision. No petty, noisy activities, no turmoil of the town, no murmur of the street shatters the profound and protracted silence in which his life is passed. The utter loneliness of day after day, and the watches of the night lighted only by the silent stars are transfused with the felt presence of the Deity. On the deep as nowhere else, “day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night sheweth knowledge.” No speech, no language, yet all eloquent of the mysterious, ineffable presence, which made the Psalmist to cry out, “The sea is His, and He made it.” “If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand shall hold me.” The sailor feels this, though he could not, it may be, express it. Among no other class of men is the religious feeling so strongly developed. Accordingly, if a wicked man he is proverbially superstitious, if a good one he is proverbially devout. Sailors as a class believe in God. They can not otherwise without doing violence to their sensibilities. It is difficult to make them atheists, unless you can keep them on shore long enough to make them forget the sea. They know the thunder of His power. They have seen the terrors of the Lord. They have heard His footsteps who “walketh upon the wings of the wind.” They are correspondingly accessible to the message of His love and grace in Jesus Christ. It is a portion of my pride of which nothing but death will ever divest me that I am the son of a sailor, and that among sailors my happy boyhood was passed. I know them, I have preached to them. There are no other such audiences. They have been subdued by the majesty of nature. They are reverential, submissive, child-like. They need and want no dialectics, no clatter of logic, nor pomp of rhetoric. The simple

story, told straight out from the heart, of Him who shared with the sailors in the toil, and the tempest, and then gave His life for their salvation, takes them captive, and they make as noble disciples now as they did at the beginning. Convert a sailor in Boston or New York, or on board his ship, and he is a Christian the world over.

I have spoken of the debt which the Christian world owes to the sailor for its very Christianity. God's unspeakable gift has come to every race upon the globe by the hands of the men of the sea. But there is an ever accruing indebtedness, which we owe to them for our civilization apart from our Christianity. What human ministry to our daily wants is so wide-spread and so minute as theirs! What a barren life would ours be without that ministry! The furnishings of our homes, the provision of our boards would fall back into primitive rudeness and meagerness but for their perpetual assistance. Every cup of coffee has been set upon your breakfast table, and again every cup of tea at night, at the risk of a score of sailors' lives. The very commodities which the pioneer of the prairies counts among the necessities of his existence, as well as the luxuries which garnish the life of the city and the town, are the fruits of his daring and fidelity in our behalf.

The wide range of foreign merchandize which any country gathers into its marts of trade and distributes again among its citizens is the evidence and the measure of its civilization. At the same time it is evidence and measure of something more that we do not often think of. It is the exponent of great dangers braved. It is the evidence often of great suffering cheerfully borne and meagerly recompensed. It is the measure of high hardihood and courage on the part of the ten thousand toilers of the deep. From the time when the ships of Tyre brought silver, and gold, and ivory, and apes, and peacocks to the court of Solomon, to the last merchantman that brought her cargo of spices into the harbor of San Francisco or New York, sailors have toiled at the ropes, by day, and trod the deck in nightly watch, and encountered windy storm and tempest, to procure what would minister to the landsman's comfort, or gratify his taste. Like Virgil's bees they are gatherers of honey, but not for themselves. You would not know your own home to night, if you were to go back to it from this place to find it stripped only of what sailor's toil had brought. You have not paid for these things when you have simply given their monetary value in exchange for them. A large part of the debt still remains uncanceled. You owe a debt of sentiment, of feeling, of gratitude. Commerce may recognize no such obligation, but equity

does. Selfishness may refuse to discharge it, but generosity and Christianity cannot.

And apart from this actual and ever accruing indebtedness I remember that we have been and may be again dependent upon these men for a more momentous and urgent service. While I have been preparing this discourse, and, indeed, almost daily for many years, I have had occasion to pass and re-pass a noble monument on Boston Common, at whose foot there stand the effigies of the American soldier and the American sailor, who joined hands a score of years ago at the call of patriotism for the salvation of our Country in her time of peril. I remember that when that fearful war broke out our lean and impoverished navy could muster but about 8,000 men. During the war that number was swelled to 75,000. And whence came that extra 67,000? Largely from our mercantile marine,—our common sailors. Hatteras, Port Royal and Hampton Roads, Donelson, Island No. Ten, Memphis, Vicksburg, Mobile, New Orleans, bear witness to the bravery and devotion of our common sailors, who were found as ready to hazard their lives for our safety in war as they ever had been for our comfort in peace. Nor under like conditions would they be found wanting now. *Common* sailors, indeed! We owe them no common debt. We owe them what money never measured,—we owe them the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Two-fold, then, is the necessity which confronts us. The sailor needs the Gospel, the Gospel needs the sailor. I plead with you for each that you will give to it the other. On the one side I see these 3,000,000 of our brethren, with no homes but their hammocks, with no Sabbath-rest breaking for them the monotony of the year, with no cessation of care, and no domestic retreat, and no unbroken repose when night stops the plow, the shuttle, and the hammer upon the land,—with no church-fellowship and no place of social prayer,—their lives passing away like their own swift ships, before the blasts of exposure, hungering for a Heavenly Presence in the ship as once the timid sailors hungered for their Lord on Galilee,—and on the other, I see their Lord and ours making the same demand now, as of old, upon His disciples in His longing to reach the world,—that the “ship should wait upon Him.”

Let us obey, my brethren, and give the Gospel to the sailor, that the sailor may be given to the Gospel, and Christ may “see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied!”

